

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

The George Eliot Review

English, Department of

---

1999

## The Politics of Religion in Felix Holt

A.G. van den Broek

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

van den Broek, A.G., "The Politics of Religion in Felix Holt" (1999). *The George Eliot Review*. 333.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/333>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## THE POLITICS OF RELIGION IN *FELIX HOLT*

by A. G. van den Broek

In chapter 3 of *Felix Holt*, the narrator gives an account of the 'social changes in Treby parish',<sup>1</sup> including the altered character of Trebian Dissent. It had

been of a quiescent, well-to-do kind, represented architecturally by a small venerable, dark-pewed chapel, built by Presbyterians, but long occupied by a sparse congregation of Independents, who were as little moved by doctrinal zeal as their church-going neighbours, and did not feel themselves deficient in religious liberty, inasmuch as they were not hindered from occasionally slumbering in their pews, and were not obliged to go regularly to the weekly prayer-meeting.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, however,

the Independent chapel began to be filled with eager men and women, to whom the exceptional possession of religious truth was the condition which reconciled them to a meagre existence, and made them feel in secure alliance with the unseen but supreme rule of a world in which their own visible part was small. There were Dissenters in Treby now who could not be regarded by the Church people in the light of old neighbours to whom the habit of going to chapel was an innocent, unenviable inheritance along with a particular house and garden, a tanyard or a grocery business — Dissenters who, in their turn, without meaning to be in the least abusive, spoke of the high-bred Rector as a blind leader of the blind. (45)

The narrator explains that this change in relations coincided with a worsening economy, increased political agitation, and most people's opposition to the very unpopular Catholic Emancipation Bill of 1829. The upshot was that many Treby Magnians, such as Mr Tiliot, became deeply suspicious of '...Dissenters, Deists, Socinians, Papists, and Radicals, who were in league to destroy the Constitution'. The Rev. Augustus Debarry, too, bristled at the Independent preacher's 'pernicious' political sermons (46). Mr Lyon later tells Felix Holt that these socio-political views involve comparisons between Old Testament characters and modern-day reformers — and why not? 'Does God know less of men than He did in the days of Hezekiah and Moses? — is His arm shortened, and is the world become too wide for His providence?' (62).

God knows, indeed. But I suspect that many readers these days find Mr Lyon's particular brand of religion too wide, or too remote, for their providence. True, Eliot's subtle references and allusions to early nineteenth-century Evangelicalism are humorous. Much of the fun surrounding Mr Lyon springs from his ability to live with one foot firmly planted in the world of early Puritan Reform and the other less firmly, perhaps, in the everyday world of Treby Magna.<sup>2</sup> And Mr Tiliot's lumping together of supposedly seditious Evangelicals, Roman Catholics and iconoclastic politicians, though not entirely unjustified, is amusing, since we often enjoy watching irritated folk, simultaneously snatching at old and newfangled ideolo-

gies. But there is more to the novel's depiction of Dissent than that. Making clear distinctions between parties or factions was not a strong point in Treby Magna, the narrator tells us: 'Tory, Whig, and Radical did not perhaps become clearer in their definition of each other; but the names seemed to acquire so strong a stamp of honour or infamy, that definitions would only have weakened the impression' (46). Yet clear distinctions are needed, and I shall also be concerned with definitions, although I hope that they will not weaken the impression of my argument — which is that the novel's treatment of religion is an inextricable part of Eliot's principal, political concern with men who were about to be enfranchised.<sup>3</sup> It will be helpful to sketch in her political concern before returning to the issue of religion.

*Felix Holt* was published on 14 June 1866, a little over a year before the Second Reform Bill of 1867. That Bill almost doubled the electoral lists in England and Wales to just under two million voters and followed significant, sometimes violent, reform agitation in the periods before and after the publication of the novel. The consequences of this continuous demand for reform were seen by many as a necessary good and others as potentially calamitous; and while Eliot was writing *Felix Holt* the subject was hotly debated in and out of Parliament. Simply put, Felix Holt, and especially Eliot's 'Address to Workingmen, by Felix Holt' (published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January 1868), are her contributions to that reform debate, which began long before the Great Reform Bill of 1832 and grumbled on well after the Second Reform Bill of 1867.

How best to exercise one's civic duty was something Eliot considered at length. In chapter 30 of *Felix Holt*, and again in his 'Address', Felix urges newly enfranchised workers to step back from emotive concerns and reflect on what is really needed. Above all, Felix urges them to see voting as an opportunity for furthering right moral conduct, not an excuse for insisting on change for its own sake. Value what is good, he says in his 'Address', because

in our old society, there are old institutions, and among them the various distinctions and inherited advantages of classes, which have shaped themselves along with the wonderful slow-growing system of things made up of our laws, our commerce, and our stores of all sorts . . . [T]he only safe way by which society can be steadily improved and our worst evils reduced is not by any attempt to do away directly with the actually existing class distinctions and advantages . . . but by the turning of Class Interests into Class Functions or duties. What I mean is, that each class should be urged by the surrounding conditions to perform its particular work under the strong pressure of responsibility to the nation at large. . . .<sup>4</sup>

In short, Felix urges people to sift history carefully, to understand the past and, thereby, the times in which they live as well as the likely outcome of the future still being shaped.

Sifting history in *Felix Holt* is also necessary in order to appreciate Eliot's point that hastily arrived at reform measures are often self-defeating. Even the sleepy provincial world of Treby Magna has moved on, the novel's Introduction makes clear. The town is, in September 1832, a relatively complex organism, requiring careful investigation. The historical evolution of Dissent is a case in point, and Dissent has a subtle role to play in Trebian politics.

Eliot's notebook, the 'Quarry for *Felix Holt*'<sup>5</sup> shows that she read up on Dissenters from mediaeval times to the 1830s and beyond. The 'Quarry' contains a number of extracts from Daniel Neale's *History of Puritans* (1732-38) and Henry Hallam's *Europe During the Middle Ages* (1818). She also read works by John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham and a variety of other political commentators. The extracts in question deal with relationships between Church and State at different times in Britain's history, the often violent clashes many groups or individuals experienced when finding themselves at odds with either State or Church, the merits and demerits of open voting or secret balloting, and so on. The particular extracts are too eclectic and specific for my immediate purposes — a sketch of the development of Dissent — and, unfortunately, *Felix Holt* does not help me much, either. At one point Selina Debarry asks about the rise of Evangelicalism and receives only a brief answer:

'How did Dissenters, and Methodists, and Quakers, and people of that sort first come up, uncle?' said Miss Selina, a radiant girl of twenty, who had given much time to the harp.

'Dear me, Selina,' said her elder sister, Harriet, whose forte was general knowledge, 'don't you remember Woodstock? They were in Cromwell's time.'

'O! Holdenough, and those people? Yes; but they preached in the churches; they had no chapels. Tell me, uncle Gus; I like to be wise,' said Selina, looking up at the face which was smiling down on her with a sort of severe benignity. 'Phil says I'm an ignorant puss.'

'The seeds of Nonconformity were sown at the Reformation, my dear, when some obstinate men made scruples about surplices and the place of the communion-table, and other trifles of that sort. But the Quakers came up about Cromwell's time, and the Methodists only in the last century. The first Methodists were regular clergymen, the more's the pity.'

'But all those wrong things — why didn't government put them down?'

'Ah, to be sure,' fell in Sir Maximus, in a cordial tone of corroboration. 'Because error is often strong, and government is often weak, my dear.' (148-9)

A more detailed background is necessary, if I am to demonstrate Eliot's treatment of Dissent in *Felix Holt*'s political argument.

Dissent, as Selina is told, dates back to the days of the Puritans in the sixteenth century, if not before. For ten years or so during the middle of the seventeenth century, Puritans enjoyed power under their champion Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), but they lost it again under Charles II (1630-85), who came to the throne in 1660. All Church of England ministers were required to accept the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, and when 2000 ministers refused, or dissented, the Church expelled them. For a time Dissenters and their congregations were persecuted, but they survived, and, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, they were eventually tolerated.

Most Dissenters continued to subscribe to John Calvin's (1509-1564) theocratic beliefs, including the idea of divine election and reprobation, which says that we are all dependent on God's two-fold predestination involving salvation or destruction. Other Dissenters, including

General Baptists, adopted the more hopeful views of the Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), which taught that people are free to choose a state of repentance and thereby live without sin.

As D. W. Bebbington points out in his very thorough *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, the heartland of English Dissent comprised East Anglia, the South Midlands and the West country<sup>6</sup>, and, throughout the eighteenth century, it had three main denominations: Presbyterians, Independents and Particular Baptists. Quakers distinguished themselves from mainstream Dissenters by professing a belief in an 'inner light', and adopting a distinctive dress, language and even a different calendar. Presbyterians embraced increasingly broad theological views as the eighteenth century progressed, many reaching the Unitarian position, itself influenced by Socinianism, which holds that God is one and Jesus is a human — not supernatural — being. Independents, meanwhile, remained orthodox and were also known as Congregationalists, because they refused to recognize the authority of all external congregations. The less numerous Particular Baptists, for their part, differed from Independents only insofar as they believed that baptism should be by immersion and only for believers.<sup>7</sup> In *Felix Holt*, Eliot alludes to Dissent's emphasis on independence from all authority but God's when Harold and Mrs Transome visit Esther and Mr Lyon to tell them of Esther's claim to Transome court, adding that they wish to avoid a lawsuit. Mr Lyon replies, 'We endeavour, sir, in our body, to hold to the apostolic rule that one Christian brother should not go to law with another; and I, for my part, would extend this rule to all my fellow-men, apprehending that the practice of our courts is little consistent with the simplicity that is in Christ' (337).

During the second half of the eighteenth century Dissent was greatly influenced by the advent of Evangelicalism, which, in turn, was affected by the Oxford Methodist movement led by John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1707-1788). Throughout the eighteenth century, Methodists hotly debated the teachings of Arminius and Calvin, and when John Wesley came to accept Arminian theology, many Calvinistic Methodists joined the ranks of Dissenters. Bebbington writes,

It has been estimated in 1750 there were about 15,000 Independent and 10,000 Particular Baptist church members. By 1800 the respective figures had risen to 35,000 and 24,000. Although there was marked population growth in the period, this rate of church growth outstripped it. The number of churches in the Particular Baptist Western and Midland Associations approximately doubled between 1780 and 1820. Furthermore, the overall increase in membership per church doubled over the period. And the most spectacular change among Calvinistic Dissenters was a great rise in the number of those who attended regularly as 'hearers' without becoming members . . . .

The Methodists made even greater progress. Their membership increased from 22,410 in 1767, the first year when it was recorded, to 88,334 in 1800 and 232,074 in 1830. Round the core of loyal members Methodist 'hearers' formed a large penumbra. In the Church of England, by contrast, the number of communicants seems to have decreased during the eighteenth century. It continued falling relative to population until the 1830s.<sup>8</sup>

It is against this historical background that Treby Magna's Dissenters should be seen. Rufus Lyon is the 'minister of the Independent Chapel' (48) and is, therefore, Calvinistic in outlook. Nevertheless, he is a moderate compared to other Dissenters. Once his Roman Catholic wife, Annette, died, and before he came to Malthouse Yard, he was forced to leave one ministry because of his temperate views. The narrator tells us that after four years of devoting himself to Annette,

Mr Lyon's reputation as a preacher and devoted pastor had revived; but some dissatisfaction beginning to be felt by his congregation at a certain laxity detected by them in his views as to the limits of salvation, which he had in one sermon even hinted might extend to unconscious recipients of mercy, he had found it desirable seven years ago to quit this ten years' pastorate and accept a call from the less important church in Malthouse Yard, Treby Magna. (86)

There, he continues to espouse moderate views. For instance, he talks to Felix about 'the eminent Mr Wesley, who, though I hold not altogether with his Arminian doctrine, nor with the usages of his institution, was nevertheless a man of God . . .' (58). This willingness to consider an alternative view also gets him into trouble when the Anglican curate, Mr Sherlock, fails to turn up for the theological challenge:

When the room was cleared of the church people, Mr Lyon wished to soothe his own spirit and that of his flock by a few reflections introductory to a parting prayer. But there was a general resistance to this effect. The men mustered round the minister, and declared their opinion that the whole thing was disgraceful to the church. Some said the curate's absence had been contrived from the first. Others more than hinted that it had been a folly in Mr Lyon to set on foot any procedure in common with Tories and clergymen, who, if they ever aped civility to Dissenters, would never do anything but laugh at them in their sleeves. Brother Kemp urged in his heavy bass that Mr Lyon should lose no time in sending an account of the affair to the Patriot; and Brother Hawkins, in his high tenor, observed that it was an occasion on which some stinging things might be said with all the extra effect of an *apropos*. (227)

Mr Lyon is once more at odds with orthodoxy when mentioning Felix by name in the evening prayer, following the latter's arrest, because Felix and his mother are not church members, only 'hearers', and, therefore, probably heterodox. The influential in his congregation, we are told, felt that in a man already far too wordy, Mr Lyon's 'naked use of a non-scriptural Treby name in an address to the Almighty was all the more offensive'. If anything, Mr Lyon should have adopted appropriate biblical phrasing, such as

'a young Ishmaelite, whom we would fain see brought back from the lawless life of the desert, and seated in the same fold even with the sons of Judah and of Benjamin', a suitable periphrasis which Brother Kemp threw off without any effort, and with all the felicity of a suggestive critic. (328-29)

This sort of squabbling is amusing but also has larger significance: if Mr Lyon's congregation does not hesitate to make its own preacher feel the full weight of its collective petulance and

intolerance, imagine their ready scorn for Treby Magna's non-Evangelicals, which is, of course, reciprocated.

Much earlier in the novel, while complaining about her son, Mrs Holt tells Mr Lyon,

'... I'm one of your congregation, though I'm not a church member, for I was born in the general Baptist connection: and as for being saved without works, there's a many, I dare say, can't do without that doctrine; but I thank the Lord I never needed to put myself on a level with the thief on the cross. I've done my duty, and more, if anybody comes to that; for I've gone without my bit of meat to make broth for a sick neighbour: and if there's any of the church members say they've done the same, I'd ask them if they had the sinking at the stomach as I have; for I've ever strove to do the right thing, and more, for good-natured I always was ...' (52)

Buried in this garrulosity is a subtle reference to the doctrine of 'being saved without works'. It is, here, lumped in with a general moan over Felix's refusal to sell the family's quack medicines. But whether or not it is clear to her, she is also referring to one of four central characteristics of Evangelicalism: activism. As Bebbington puts it, the four characteristics are

... conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed [through repentance]; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort [in other words, by doing God's work]; biblicism, [having] a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.<sup>9</sup>

Activism lies at the heart of the Evangelical work ethic, but Mrs Holt's allusion to it is deeply ironic. Many Evangelicals compelled themselves to work extremely hard in their efforts to further God's work.<sup>10</sup> Mrs Holt's interest in activism, however, is more particular. There are those, like Mr Lyon, who quietly devote themselves to God's work; and others, like Mrs Holt, who like to brag about it later. Then there are those Evangelicals more concerned with one-upmanship than anything else. Add to them the Selina Debarrys of this world, who only give time to the harp, and there emerges before us a picture of a very disparate society. And that disparate-ness underscores Eliot's political concern, begging the rhetorical question, 'What will these people with their wildly different beliefs and backgrounds agree on when it comes to reform issues or measures?'

The problem of disparateness is further intensified when the role of the Church of England is considered. Until the Methodist revival of the 1830s, the Church remained largely latitudinarian in outlook. It had a small Evangelical wing, but the vast majority espoused a natural religion, largely unemotional and free of dogma. Its ministers came from the social elite, or were at least educated with the elite at Oxford or Cambridge. Consequently, most clergy could be relied upon to support Parliament's conservative thinking. For some, as Norman Sykes points out, an Anglican minister's primary function was to give the Sunday sermon, which taught the lower order its place in the grand scheme of things.<sup>11</sup> For most, however, as Richard Altick puts it, Anglicanism 'was a gentleman's religion, administered by clergy of worldly tastes and

ambitions largely unaffected by the spirit of Christianity.’<sup>12</sup> Eliot’s Reverend John Lingon is a fully paid-up member. Eliot’s narrator describes him this way:

The Rector of Little Treby had been a favourite in the neighbourhood since the beginning of the century. A clergyman thoroughly unclerical in his habits had a piquancy about him which made him a sort of practical joke. He had always been called Jack Lingon, or Parson Jack — sometimes, in older and less serious days, even ‘Cock-fighting Jack’. He swore a little when the point of a joke seemed to demand it, and was fond of wearing a coloured bandana tied loosely over his cravat, together with large brown leather leggings; he spoke in a pithy familiar way that people could understand, and had none of that frigid mincingness called dignity, which some have thought a peculiar clerical disease. In fact, he was ‘a character’ — something cheerful to think of, not entirely out of connection with Sunday and sermons. (185-6)

He suffers an aberration of conservative sensibilities when he supports Harold Transome’s Radical candidacy, but he quickly repents when that bid fails, telling Harold,

‘ . . . Dash it! now the election’s over: I’m an old Tory again. You see, Harold, a Radical won’t do for the county. At another election, you must be on the look-out for a borough where they want a bit of blood. I should have liked you uncommonly to stand for the county; and a Radical of good family squares well enough with a new-fashioned Tory like young Debarry . . . ’ (378)

Like it or not Lingon is right: old, established ideas take a long time dying out; reform may be very well in newly populated boroughs where traditions and traditional ways of thinking have yet to establish themselves, but radicalism ‘won’t do’ for well-established, conservative minded counties — not yet, anyway.

The novel’s other Church minister, the Reverend Augustus Debarry, is described as ‘really a fine specimen of the old-fashioned aristocratic clergyman, preaching short sermons, understanding business, and acting liberally about his tithe . . . ’ As I mentioned earlier, he has lately begun to worry about Mr Lyon’s ‘political sermons’ and Dissenters generally getting more ‘land to build more chapels’ (46). What Eliot is alluding to, here, is the Disestablishment movement, which began in the late 1820s. This movement was a backlash to the discrimination Dissenters had faced ever since their expulsion from the Church of England. For instance, although they were not debarred from sitting in the House of Commons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they were largely consigned to the margins of society and so had very little help from those in authority. A body known as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies was set up in the eighteenth century and worked with the few Nonconformist MPs in Parliament to combat some of the restrictions placed on Dissenters, including limitations on places and opportunities to preach.<sup>13</sup> But only in 1828 did the Deputies and their supporters in Parliament pressure the government into repealing the Test and Corporation Acts, which had prevented Dissenters from holding public offices. Until then Dissenters could only serve their communities, if they agreed to take Church of England sacraments. But as Derek Beales points out, even after 1828, ‘Dissenters were liable to have to pay rates for the upkeep of their parish



church, and sometimes it was the duty of a Nonconformist churchwarden to levy the rate.’<sup>14</sup> The issue of such unfair, compulsory contributions is raised in *Felix Holt* when Harold Transome visits Rufus Lyon while canvassing for the December 1832 election. He tells Mr Lyon, ‘On questions connected with religious liberty I would stop short at no measure that was not thorough.’

‘I hope not, sir — I hope not,’ said Mr Lyon, gravely; finally putting on his spectacles and examining the face of the candidate, whom he was preparing to turn into a catechumen. For the good Rufus, conscious of his political importance as an organ of persuasion, felt it his duty to catechise a little, and also to do his part towards impressing a probable legislator with a sense of his responsibility . . . . It was impossible to leave the question of church-rates without noting the grounds of their injustice, and without a brief enumeration of reasons why Mr Lyon, for his own part, would not present . . . passive resistance to a legal imposition . . . . (166)

Following the Great Reform Bill of 1832, Dissenters, many suddenly enfranchised, were even more inclined to challenge the Establishment on issues close to their hearts, including obstacles to, or substitutes for, the gospel; various kinds of sexual wrongdoing; drunkenness; and, sabbath-breaking.<sup>15</sup> All this coincided with other significant developments in Britain’s long-established way of life. During the time *Felix Holt* reflects, the Church of England’s political clout and influence came under attack from all quarters. Many Anglicans wondered whether or not non-Anglicans would soon dominate the government. Roman Catholics were enfranchised in 1829, a reversal of fortune met with enormous hostility throughout the country; the Archbishop of Canterbury’s High Court of Delegates, which had been the final court of appeal on ecclesiastical matters, including matters of doctrine, was replaced by a secular body called the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council; the Irish Church Temporalities Act of 1833 introduced a lay element in the organization of that church; and the municipal Corporations Act of 1828 had the effect of handing over the rule of many towns to Dissenters.<sup>16</sup>

In *Felix Holt*, a keen awareness of the Disestablishment movement lies behind Reverend Debarry’s refusal to debate with Mr Lyon on ‘the Constitution of the true Church’ and ‘the bearing thereupon of the English Reformation’ (159). The debate never takes place, and so it is not entirely clear what Mr Lyon planned to say. Bebbington points out that a Calvinistic revival among Evangelicals began in the 1830s and was characterized by ‘a growing yearning after the primitive convictions of the Reformation divines’.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, since Mr Lyon wants to talk about the Reformation, he probably has a theological debate in mind. However, his other call, to debate church constitution, suggests a desire to consider the separation of Church and State, a topic central to the Disestablishment movement. Either way, it comes as no surprise that Reverend Debarry initially declines Mr Lyon’s challenge. A leading Dissenter of that time, Thomas Binney, had declared that ‘the Established Church destroyed more souls than it saved,’ a comment long remembered, despite Binney’s attempts to qualify it.<sup>18</sup> Against this backdrop, Reverend Debarry’s observation to Philip Debarry makes considerable sense. In debating Rufus Lyon, he says,

‘I should be making a figure which my brother clergy might well take as an

affront to themselves. The character of the establishment has suffered enough already through the Evangelicals, with their extempore incoherence and their pipe-smoking piety. Look at Wimple, the man who is vicar of Shuttleton – without his gown and bands, anybody would take him for a grocer in mourning.’

‘Well [Philip Debarry answers], I shall cut a still worse figure, and so will you, in the dissenting magazines and newspapers. It will go the round of the kingdom. There will be a paragraph headed, “Tory Falsehood and Clerical Cowardice,” or else “The Meanness of the Aristocracy and the Incompetence of the Beneficed Clergy”.’ (216)

For its part, the Establishment hit back at Dissenters whenever it could, a point not lost in the novel, either. Mr Lyon offers to help Felix find a job as a clerk, saying,

‘I could speak to Brother Muscat, who is well acquainted with all such openings. Any place in Pendrell’s Bank, I fear, is now closed against such as are not Churchmen. It used not to be so, but a year ago he discharged Brother Bodkin, although he was a valuable servant . . . .’ (60)

Thus raged the religious maelstrom, which helped feed the demands for political reform in the 1830s — and beyond, for that matter. For just as political agitation gathered steam again in the 1860s, having gone quiet with the demise of Chartism in the 1850s, so Dissenters realigned themselves with various political causes in the decade before the Second Reform Bill of 1867.<sup>19</sup> The point behind the novel’s emphasis on religion is overtly made by Felix Holt in his impromptu address to the Duffield market crowd on Nomination day:

How can political freedom make us better, any more than a religion we don’t believe in, if people laugh and wink when they see men abuse and defile it?... [W]hile public opinion is what it is — while men have no better beliefs about public duty — while corruption is not felt to be a damning disgrace — while men are not ashamed in Parliament and out of it to make public questions which concern the welfare of millions a mere screen for their private ends, — I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition. (274)

Felix is far from being Eliot’s unqualified hero,<sup>20</sup> but on this issue he is, I think, speaking for her. Eliot’s cautious approach to reform did not spring from a fear of change or some blind faith in conservatism but a strong awareness that people are often quirky and intolerant and ungenerous. Her caution was justified, for how often, both before and after the 1830s, has the world seen people using religion as a political football?

## Notes

1. George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. A. G. van den Broek (Everyman paperback; London: J. M. Dent, 1997, 47. Subsequent page references to the novel are to this edition, and will appear in the text.

2. For a discussion on Mr Lyon's comic representation, see Oliver Lovesey, *The Clerical Character in George Eliot's Fiction*, English Literary Studies Ser. 53 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1991) 80-1.
3. Women, of course, did not get the vote until February 1918, and then only those who were married and were thirty or over. All other women over twenty-one had to wait until May 1929.
4. George Eliot, 'Address to Workingmen, by Felix Holt', in *Felix Holt*, appendix C, 455.
5. Notebook ms. Yale, Eliot/IV, 10, Yale, Yale University Library.
6. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989; London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 125.
7. Bebbington, 18.
8. Bebbington, 21, 32-3.
9. Bebbington 2-3.
10. See Bebbington's section on Activism, pp. 10-12, in which he outlines the punishing workloads adopted by many Evangelicals.
11. Norman Sykes, 'The Hanoverian Church,' *The English Tradition: Modern Studies in English History*, eds. Norman F. Cantor and Michael S. Werthman (1971; London: Macmillan, 1967), 52. See also Bebbington, 17.
12. Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1973), 204.
13. Bebbington (23) notes that Mr Tryan, in Eliot's 'Janet's Repentance,' faces this sort of opposition: his proposal to deliver Sunday evening lectures in the town's church is first challenged and then undermined by Dempster and his followers, who variously threaten anyone wanting to hear Tryan.
14. Derek Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone 1815-1885* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 53-4.
15. Bebbington, 133-5.
16. Beales, 124.
17. Bebbington, 77-8.
18. Bebbington, 99.
19. Beales, 197-8.

20. For a discussion on the irony surrounding Eliot's treatment of Felix Holt, see my "Shakespeare at the Heart of George Eliot's England," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*, Nos 24-5 (1993) 34-64; also, my introduction to the Everyman paperback edition of Felix Holt, xxvii-xxviii.